the means of transforming our monotonous fronts with their (to use the words of Mr. Elmes), "two windows, iron railing, and a door, two windows, iron railing and a door," into façades of palatial aspect, by the simple presence of the long continuous array of varied columns, arches, and cantalivers, which would be actually demanded for their *bond fide* construction.

WILLIAM YOUNG.

FALL OF RAILWAY ARCHES, CAMDEN TOWN.

THE desirability of our suggestion as to a judicial inquiry into the causes of the fall of the arches over the Kentish-Town-road, has been largely recognized, but it is to be feared that it will fall to the ground.

It is certainly important to the reputation of English engineers, that some measures be taken to put a stop to the failures which take place upon railway works every week. At present information can be obtained only by an examination by some unofficial person, who brings the matter in a very irregular manner before the public. His sources of information are of course imperfect; the results almost useless: a discussion arises perhaps in the papers, and then the affair is forgotten, to be merely another proof of official carelessness, recklessness, or jobbery.

What unknown problems are there in viaduct building which remain to be solved at the present day? What more do we require to learn about the foundations to be met with near any of our large towns? Yet we can hardly ever take up a railway paper without meeting with the account of some viaducts having fallen. It is high time a stop should be put to this. In the present case, why does not the Railway Company institute a searching inquiry into the cause of the accident? It will be long before public opinion can be reassured as to the safety of the remainder of their road. At any rate the shareholders should be informed as to who is to pay for the new works.

As far as can be learned from a casual inspection (and we are bound to say the builder, Mr. Hicks, showed every desire that we should be fully informed on the matter), there are no conditions in the superstructure to account for the fall of the arches. The dimensions of the piers and of the arches seem sufficient. The piers are 4 feet wide at one end, 3 feet 11 inches at the other, being on a curve; 27 feet long and 17 feet high to springing. The arches are *segments*, 8 feet rise and 27 feet span. The work and materials appear to be of a rather superior quality. The bricks used look like good sound stocks; the mortar of the piers was made of ground stone lime, which, indifferent as it is, is still the best usually employed in London; the arches are all apparently executed in cement upon this portion of the line, those still in place as well as the fallen ones being thus executed. On a *prima facie* view of the case, therefore, we are justified in supposing that the cause of failure must be sought for in the foundations. And, in the neighbourhood, common report says that one of the piers was built upon an old drain, unconsolidated, untouched, left just as it was found, with all the made ground around it.

If this be the case, the onus of investigation would seem to rest with the engineer. He had no right to build a viaduct in such a position, with one of its piers on such a foundation. The footings were 1 foot 3 inches below the ground, and the concrete about 1 foot 9 inches deep.

A remark to be made in passing is, that it is very injudicious to execute a long range of arches without introducing occasionally a pier of extra thickness, to form an intermediate abutment. Here we have about 16 or 17 arches in a row, and so constructed that if one pier fall all the others must follow like a pack of cards. Seven arches fell; more would have fallen if the interruption had not existed, in fact, from the stout abutment of the large arch over the road on one side, and from the centres being left in the arches of similar span on the other. Many viaducts, such as the Greenwich railway, have stood, with thirty or more similar arches in a row; but it is running an unfair, a useless risk, as we see in this case, and as was proved by the fall of the Barentin viaduct. The distance between the Hampstead-road and the Kentish-town-road ought to have been divided into at least three bays, with a stouter pier at each division.

ERRORS IN ORNAMENTAL DESIGN.

MOST heartily do I agree with those correspondents of THE BUILDER who deprecate that mistakenly extravagant taste for excessive decoration, which was manifested in the pattern productions at the Birmingham exhibition, and which appears to be one of the manias of the present day, although it is one in quite an opposite direction from most of them. We appear to take the reverse of wrong for right. After having affected almost Quaker-like plainness in our buildings, our houses, and furniture, we are now running into the contrary extreme, and are applying embellishment—or what should be embellishment—to everything alike, and to every part of everything, till "we can't see the wood for the trees." Our apartments are beginning to smack of the toy-shop and show-room. To be *comme il faut*, every piece of furniture must ostentatiously solicit examination; everything must be be-carved or be-patterned, even to satiety; and the same kind of patterns are applied nearly alike to everything,—to book-covers and to table-covers, to the borders of envelopes and title-pages, and to the borders of rooms, to carpets, and to walls. With very much more than enough of ornament, we get very little variety of it: no proper distinction is observed in the application of it; and with so little of artistic discretion and reserve is it frequently bestowed, that it conceals or else disguises what it is intended to set off; and human figures and animal forms—nay, even "creeping things"—are introduced, as decoration, in such a preposterous manner as to become only so many childish conceits. You see snakes twining themselves round your candlesticks, and sidereal dwarfs perched on the top of your fire-irons; you eat your strawberries off leaves of crockery, and sip your wine out of flower-shaped devices. Should this taste prevail much longer, the furniture of our drawing-rooms will pretty much resemble that of Noah's ark, with the addition of a *hortus siccus*. It may, perhaps, be in conformity with that "study Nature" doctrine which many have now in their mouths—though what they mean by it they do not say, notwithstanding that it requires very careful explanation; but to me it seems to partake largely of the antic and unnatural, and to accuse those who design and manufacture ornamental wares of great lack of invention. That the direct imitation of natural objects—whether human figures, animals, or flowers, &c.—ought to be entirely exploded from decorative design, I will not say; but it certainly ought to be resorted to very sparingly,—whereas it is now made use of so indiscreetly, that, unless checked, it will soon become stale and common-place, if not vulgar.

Contrary to what has been said again and again as to refined taste being compatible with economy, inasmuch as it may be made to exhibit itself by means of very little more than elegance of forms and well-considered artistic design, far more pains are bestowed on mere superfluous ornament and elaboration, than study is given to beauty of general composition. Many of the articles in the Birmingham exhibition attested this very strongly, they being very uncouth and tasteless,—some of them decidedly ugly, yet at the same time expensive on account of the workmanship thrown away upon them. Several of the articles of furniture seemed to be, if not actually brought out from lumber-rooms and brokers' shops, modelled after the household antiquities which may any day be discovered in such repositories. There were spider-legged tables, and plenty of crinkum-crankums, and such superlative novelties as *small* looking-glasses, with sconces, all which are rather symptoms of relapse, than of improvement or advance in taste. Although the mill which is said to grind old ladies into young ones is altogether fabulous, a mill there does appear to be which grinds old fashions into spick-and-span new ones. Of *bond fide* novelty in furniture and decoration, we do not get much, nor shall we get, so long as we allow traditional and hackneyed ideas to block up the way against original invention. I am somewhat justified in saying this, because, although I do not actually practise that branch of design, I have given some earnest attention to it, and so far with success as to have devised several quite fresh and unedited contrivances. Among them is what I call a *Pinacotheca*, which piece of furniture I have had made, and it is now before me. What it exactly is, I am not bound here to disclose, but its purpose may be partly guessed from the name I have given it. As it serves a double purpose, it is exceedingly convenient as well as ornamental,—nevertheless nothing wonderful, the only strange part of the matter being, that the same idea should never have presented itself to any of those who manufacture articles of furniture, and whose interest consequently it is to bring out, if they can, novel contrivances. The exhibition which is to take place in 1851, will perhaps now cause them to set their wits to work. I myself somewhat doubt it, but *nous verrons*.

If French taste and skill are fairly represented at the "Exposition" in George-street, I should say that the admiration generally professed for them is not over creditable either to our discernment or our patriotism. Neither is it particularly patriotic on the part of those who have got up that speculation, to attempt to pass off the collection as the very cream of that branch of French *industrie*, for if such it be, what sort of stuff must its skimmed milk be? Mr. Graham's letter, however, in the *Times* of last Saturday, flatly contradicts that assertion, informing us, that so far from such being the case, many of the articles are "old shopkeepers," which it is now attempted to get rid of by a novel scheme.

There is a great deal of gewgaw showiness, but very little evidence of refinement and careful artistic study. Of many of the productions the chief merit seems to be their extravagant costliness, a merit which may recommend them to the purse-proud and *nouveaux riches*, to those who possess far more money than judgment, and who pique themselves upon scorning the home-spun John Bullish productions of our English artisans and manufacturers.

There is, indeed, one article in the "Exposition" which is calculated to excite, if not exactly admiration, supreme astonishment at its truly surprising absurdity and utter bathos, namely, an atrociously vile picture, with the face of a watch stuck into it to represent a clock in a church tower, and with several figures which, when the chimes strike, jerk their arms most *unnaturally*. Such a specimen of French taste would hardly be tolerated in an English pothouse.

The newspapers talk of its being likely that her Majesty will visit the Exposition. Let us hope that her Majesty will do no such thing; for she might just as well visit any other bazaar or auction-room, where she would be likelier to find many specimens of better taste.

ZETA.

*** *The French Exposition.*—We have allowed our correspondent (with a few reservations), to state his own opinion on the collection in Great George-street; and we may add that it represents that of several other persons who have addressed us upon it. Our own opinion we have already expressed, namely, that the collection contains many beautiful works, which demand the careful inspection of our manufacturers. The mistake made by the friends of the undertaking, and which has raised ill-will against it, has been the endeavour to give a wrong character to what is in fact (and this is nothing against it) a pecuniary speculation.

THE BEDFORDSHIRE ARCHITECTURAL AND ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY had a meeting on Tuesday week, when a resolution was passed, inviting the St. Alban's Society to meet this Society at Dunstable in the ensuing spring. Office bearers were elected, and some other business gone through. The Rev. H. E. Havergal submitted a plan for restoring Elstow Church. The council were directed to memorialize the Duke of Bedford, who is a member, to preserve some interesting buildings of perpendicular character about to be destroyed at Willington.

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